



## Bent Not Broken

**Lorna Schultz Nicholson**

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In this touching and heartbreaking novel, a young girl struggles to fit together parts of her life while dealing with a traumatic brain injury, navigating the mazes of family, friendship, and personal identity. Lorna Schultz Nicholson's *Bent Not Broken* is a powerful look into tragedy and new beginnings.

When Madeline was just eight years old, a bike accident left her with a traumatic brain injury that has slowed her speech and affected her gait. That injury changed not only Madeline's life, but the life of her entire family, including her twin sister Becky. Now, the two no longer seem to have the inseparable bond they once had—Becky is more interested in hanging out with her new, cigarette-smoking friends, and Madeline has become a burden and a chore. Madeline's one respite is visiting miniature therapy horses, something that she becomes eager to share with a boy named Justin when Becky expresses her disinterest. Justin, Madeline's assigned Best Buddy (a volunteer program) at school, is at first reluctant—his deceased, autistic sister Faith used to visit horses, and they bring up difficult memories for him. But together, Madeline and Justin help each other work through their family relationships and find peace and solace in their lives.

*Bent Not Broken* gives a voice to Madeline in a strong, believable way: through her narration, it's easy to understand the girl whose words, actions, and even emotions can't always keep up with her thoughts, as well as sympathize with the way the world has changed in its treatment of her after her accident. In a way, Madeline seems trapped in her own body, but her spirit comes through clearly over the course of the novel, and it's Madeline's own agency that ends up shaping the lives of those around her.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN (May/June 2017)

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